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ABSTRACT

Disclosing interpretation as a meaning-making process of the active mind to students in all humanities courses, and especially in literature classes, is possible in numerous, phased writing assignments with built-in exercises in recursive and reflective thinking. The exercises are written down in each student's log (journal), a process which allows students to enter into dialogic discourse with themselves and with others in the class. The exercises ask for: (1) expressions of feeling, reactions, and impressions; (2) observations and reflections; (3) generalizations, hypotheses, and theories; (4) testing hypotheses, formulating theses; and (5) meta-interpretation and reflection. The student log, in any class, enables students to become aware of themselves as meaning-makers by tracking the dialogue between themselves and the text, the "inner" dialogue, and the social dialogue inherent in critical consciousness and meaning making. (A figure illustrating the double helix model is appended.) (RS)

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LOGGING THE INTERPRETIVE ACT:
DIALOGICAL INTERACTION IN THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM

(Revised Draft of a paper read at CCCC, March 17, 1988)

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Recent debates over the problems of cultural literacy, pluralistic values, and the place of literary theory in the classroom (Bloom, Graff, and Hirsch) have raised concern both about the proper aims of teaching literature and about how these aims might be achieved. While these debates focus largely on defining the content of the English curriculum as both the source and means of achieving knowledge of literary works, they offer little in the way of specific pedagogical approaches to teaching literature. While skirting the issue of course content (what we should be teaching in literature classes), I believe we can accomplish more in terms of teaching knowledge about literature, the theoretical debates, and the actual nature of interpretation in all humanities courses by examining the pedagogy of the classroom. In this paper, I would like to propose a heuristic for the literature classroom that is grounded in the trans-actional nature of reading and writing, as well as in learning theory of educational psychology. This epistemic approach, while focused on literature and tracing the interpretive processes, corresponds in theory and practice to Bartholomae and Petrosky's widely-respected pedagogical approach to a college-level course in basic reading and writing (1986), which in turn relies upon theories of making meaning in the works of Lev Vygotsky, Paulo Freire, and Ann Berthoff.

In the past, teaching literature presupposed that teachers knew why they were teaching literature and, furthermore, that they might even agree upon what literary texts "mean"--a presumption which (as we have become increasingly aware) raises profound epistemolgical, as well

as thecretical, questions: What does a text mean and to whom? How does it mean? And what does it mean "to mean"? In the midst of the theoretical debates over these issues, teachers of literature seem to be faced with just a handful of options : first, the "reactionary" tendency to ignore theoretical questions in the undergraduate literature classroom and, thereby, "pretend" to teach content (perhaps Hirsch's lists or Bloom's "canon"); secondly, to mask our personal ideologies or "contexts" (feminist, marxist, structuralist, deconstructionist, etc.) as the position of authority; or, as Gerald Graff suggests in *Professing Literature*, to foreground the debates of the various ideological camps, thereby risking in practical terms making the theoretical debates, in place of literature, the focus of the literature classroom.

In contrast, the epistemic approach derived from recent advances in composition theory (Berthoff, Bartholomae and Petrosky) presents a fourth option: to empower students with the critical reading and writing skills to create meanings and to evaluate the theoretical controversies that arise over interpretations in a pluralistic classroom. In a recent review of *Professing Literature*, Charles Altieri has written on the subject of teaching the theoretical debates, "If we are to prevent such teaching from serving as a bargain basement for ideas or disguised propaganda, we must worry not only about what we teach but about how we prepare people to evaluate the controversies" (Altieri, 69).

Similarly, in a recent review of books by Bloom, Hirsch, and Graff, Robert Scholes makes the important distinction between merely learning

information and learning how to process or use information: "the difference between the 'elaborated' language of the empowered and the 'restricted' language of the powerless is not a matter of information but of a certain way of processing and presenting information" (Scholes, 332). Although I applaud Graff's perceptiveness and the democractic spirit of his proposal to "teach the debate," in essence, I see little difference between his emphasis and that of Bloom and Hirsch in the sense that all three men argue for merely imposing various kinds of "information" representative of the "language of the empowered."

This conflict, however, does not merely resurrect the content *versus* skills paradox, at least not in the conventional sense of mechanical or rhetorical skills common to English studies. Rather, as Freire has argued in a genuinely democratic spirit, the skill that our students need is that of a critical consciousness, or "conscientization" (Freire, 1970). Such a priceless, life-long skill enables students to evaluate these controversies in interpreting literature and to gain an awareness of their own meaning-making power, i.e., "to interpret their interpretations" (Burke, 6).

DIALOGUE IN THE CLASSROOM:

Various thinkers have written about the importance of dialogue in education. As Gadamer has written, "To understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue. . . One must take up into himself what is said to him in such a fashion that it speaks and finds an answer in

the words of his own language" (*Philosophical Hermeneutics* quoted in Salvatori's essay). In addition, the "educational dialogue" of which Paulo Freire speaks applies to our conversations both with ourselves and with others (Friere, 1970). In the next portion of this essay, I would like to show how three types of dialogues that are important to the epistemic pedagogy of reading and writing in the literature classroom. These three dialogues are: the dialogue between the student and the text, the "inner" dialogue or conversation of the student with himself, and the social dialogue or dialectic among students.

Inner Dialogue:

Berthoff, using Vygotsky, has argued about the importance of dialectical thinking to concept formation ("forms of relatedness"), the heart of the interpretive process, thus offering a needed corrective to the linear or hierarchically ordered schemata of cognitive and educational psychology. According to Vygotsky, concept formation is really "a movement of thought . . . constantly alternating between two directions, from the particular to the general and from the general to the particular (Vygotsky, 80). Berthoff has graphically described this process in the shape of a double helix to suggest the recursive nature of the meaning-making process. (See Appendix A.) For Berthoff, the log notebook (I'll discuss it below) in any class enables students to become aware of themselves as meaning-makers by tracking the "dialogic action," inner dialogue," or "dialectical thinking" inherent in critical consciousness and meaning making (i.e., REformulating questions and answers, REconsider-

ing, and REflection). Berthoff emphasizes the importance of dialogical thinking in writing classes:

> If we are to keep interpretation central, our best hope is to encourage our students to read the word as they read the world. *If we can make writing represent the processes of perception and dialogue, we will find ways of teaching composition as the kind of non-linear process it is.* I believe that writing becomes an authentic mode of learning and way of knowing when it serves to enable students to record dialogic action and to represent the inner dialogue which is thought . . . Writing dialectically encourages, as it requires conscientization, the critical consciousness of oneself as meaning-maker" (Berthoff, 1986, p.127)

Another way of describing the pedagogy of this type of literature class is with the term *inquiry*: an ongoing questioning dialectic in search of meaning. Like Berthoff's recursive thinking in concept formation, Hillocks' model of basic inquiry (which, also, includes observing, describing, and comparing/ contrasting, enumerative generalities, definitions, and hypotheses) allows for the recursive strategies of testing for reliability or validity. However, the positivistic assumptions in Hillock's model of basic inquiry with regard to an unmediated, objective reality which is "verifiable" or testable highlights the important epistemological differences between Berhoff's and most cognitive psychologists's models of concept formation and the role of the imagination in interpretation.

Dialogue with self and others:

The dialectical nature of interpretation and language as a "speculative instrument" (I.A. Richards in Berthoff, 1981), in conjunction with literature, should rightfully become the focus of the activities in the literature class. The dialectic in the meaning-making process can take place "intrapersonally" or "interpersonally" (Vygotsky), that is, by way of the individual with himself through recursive writings or by way of the individual and his peers sharing responses and hypotheses in oral and written form. As Berthoff has said, "Language is an exchange: we know what we've said and what can be understood from it when we get a response" (Berthoff, 72).

With regard to intrapersonal meaning making, Bleich tells us that knowledge is produced primarily through "cognitive stereoscopy"--that is, shifing from a unit-by-unit approach to assignments to recursive writing (that takes place before and after discussion and reflection) and to the paired essay assignment (Bleich, 105). The dialogical or "stereoscopic" approach foregrounds the areas of possible agreement and difference--and helps the student "to retrieve the set of assumptions that gave birth to particular meanings that have been attributed to particular texts" (Horton, p. 20). Writing reflectively helps students make sense of the dialectic, first, between their changing drafts and, then, between theirs and the drafts of other students, that is "to interpret their interpretations." This helps to develop their critical consciousness essential to "strong reading" (Bartholomae and Petrosky). They can analyze how their interpretations do or do not compare with one anothers and, more importantly, why they do

not. If one accepts that the goal of interpretation is to arrive at "the fullest possible interpretation" (Horton), then this approach should encourage students to strive toward some consistency and coherence among their interpretations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING:

In the past decade, the cognitive parallels between reading and writing, and the relationship between writing and learning have been the subjects of pedagogical theory and groundbreaking reseach. For example, recently Toby Fulwiler has written about the importance of writing as "an important index to intellectual thought and development rather than a mechanical skill in constant need of correction and evaluation." (Fulwiler, 36) The points that Fulwiler outlines are worth repeating as a summary of the arguments on the importance of integrating writing into the literature classroom:

1. "the more people write, the better they learn; writing is the most powerful use of language for developing sustained critical thought; it helps people to visualize thought and therefore to modify, extend, develop, or criticize it."

2. "the more that students write, the more active they become in creating their own education: writing frequently, for themselves as well as their instructors, helps students discover, rehearse, express, extend, and develop their own ideas." (Fulwiler, 1988)

Despite these insights, the trickle down effect of such current theory into classroom practice, at least with regard to college literature classes, has resembled maple syrup in March.

The Role of the Log:

I believe that students can learn more about how texts mean, as well as what they mean and how they as readers create meanings, in a modified-interactive classroom. Such a class which apportions class time into lecture, general or group reading and discussion, and log writing, encourages students to enter into dialogical discourse with themselves and, both directly and indirectly, with others in the class. They do this by reflecting in writing upon the differences between their own earlier and later points of view and between theirs and others and by revising earlier drafts.

The log notebook, perhaps more than other type of writing format, offers the most immediate and accessible way for students: (1) to organize and reflect upon changes in their responses, ideas, and points of view, and (2) to make them conscious of the processes of reading and writing as forming (finding relationships) and forming as interpretation. This involves asking students to organize their log notebooks to allow for "opposing" on-going observations or responses, finding and naming relationships, listing evidence (textual or extrinsic), defining issues, problems, and concepts, generating questions and hypotheses, evaluating and reformulating hypotheses, and formulating and supporting a thesis. Readers follow this process in a way that is recursive and on-going (not linear).

The log notebook is ideally suited to cultivate a critical consciousness through dialogical exercises involving the student's personal ongoing

questioning, responding, rereading, reformulating, or revising (or re-seeing) earlier assignments. It can also be used to create a bridge between the two-phased process of "translation" (Steiner cited in Bartholomae and Petrosky) from the text's to the student's language and from the student's to the academy's discourse. In addition, students themselves may generate a number of different responses or perspectives, evaluate the differences and, in turn, to take a position. Then, if all the student's drafts are saved in the "dialectical notebook," she can go back at any time to think about the "what" and the "why" of the changes.

Logging Inner/Outer Dialogues:

The reason that making conscious the dialectic is so important in studying literature is that "what is there" can be understood only through the act of experiencing the text, of making the "mute" text speak to us as individuals, dialogically. As Mariolina Salvatori has written, "The *remedial* approach is replaced by one of *mediation* as both teachers and students learn to ask and to answer questions that make texts speak, and speak away silences with "voices" that *mediate* and *remediate* understanding in continuous, enriching dialogues" (Salvatori in Bartholomae and Petrosky, 139). In addition, as hermeneutic philosphers from Bultmann and Heidegger to Horton have argued, the reader in the process of reading reconstitutes what is there very selectively, often only partially; in fact, such is the nature of all mediated, interpretive acts. And this act of reconstituing the text, the hermeneutical process of selecting a part (word, line, sentences, section), which will generate a

"sorting" or selected "context" during the experience of reading, is largely grounded in one's pre-understandings (Bultmann's phrase originally) of what should be there. According to Susan Horton, "Interpretation is as much recreation as retrieval" (Horton, 3) These pre-understandings might include the reader's knowledge of literary conventions or of implicit or explicit "forms" of literary discourse (such as genres, motifs, patterns, syntaxes, grammars, or tropes), or a knowledge of pertinent extrinsic factors (such as biography, history, or philosophy).

The function of the log notebook is to create a visible "text" out of the student's personal dialogue with the literary texts, as well as, to create a forum where on-going conversations can take place for expanding upon, revising, or comparing/contrasting earlier and later log writings, sequenced assignments, or drafts of the same paper (all of which include recursive and reflective thinking). The following sequenced writing assignments appear to follow a hierarchically ordered schemata (such as Hillock's), however, they involve a good deal of dialectical or recursive thinking and writing. I own a number of ideas in the phased writing assignments below to Berthoff (1982, 1986), Bartholmae and Petrosky (1986), who astutely apply many of Berthoff's ideas to a course in Basic Reading and Writing, Bleich (1986), Lindberg (1986), and Salvatori (1986). The following phased assignments are addressed to the students:

1. Phase I (inner dialogue: feelings, reactions, impressions):
This phase represents the first step toward making the text "speak" in the student's own language (Gadamer, Salvatori) and creating a "text" in their own language.

-- Write down your first reactions to characters or events, noting what stands out and why (ie.,their significance), or the connections to your own life or memories (others books, courses, conversations).
--Jot down questions about language (denotation or connotation), structure, character, or plot, at various different times during your reading experience.
--Reflect upon how your response to character or event A compares with your response to character or event B (in the same or in a different work), or how your response to A would be different if you could change factor y about him or her?

2. **Phase II (observations, reflections)**: This phase relates to the process of naming, sorting, gathering, and opposing in the process of hypothesis and concept formation (Berthoff,1982).

-- In a small group, jot down names of characters, make a list of events and place a star next to the most significant, then explain the reason for your choice; make clusters of related words, repeated images or ideas, similarites or differences in formal features, characterization, plot (as with a work of the same genre).
--Compare/contrast your personal responses with those of another student (e.g. by male/female, racial, ethnic or age differences) by two's or small groups, and to try to explain the reasons for the differences of your responses.
-- Make a list of characters, events, or images and categorize them in a way meaningful to you; name at least three or four categories

and, then, share these with other students.

--Jot down a list of opposing characters, events, or images and compare/contrast your findings with those of other students.

3. **Phase III (generalizations, hypotheses, theories)**: Several important types of thinking occur in this phase. For example, the dialogue between students allows them to recognize their preunderstandings and selectivity in reading (Horton), to reconsider overlooked evidence, and to form hypotheses and concepts by comparing/contrasting their own earlier and later responses and ideas, and their responses and ideas with those of another students (Berthoff, Bleich).

--Formulate a theory about why you had the reactions you had at various times in the story. Compare/contrast your own with another student's explanations . Map a structure of the work (time, place, patterns of experience) and compare/contrast with another student's.

--Explain a "problem" in the work you have defined yourself: e.g., physical, metaphysical, or psychological causes; the dramatic or thematic purpose of a character, event, or language; the thematic or symbolic meaning of a character, event, or language.

-- In a small group, make a list of these "problems" and of of the "evidence" you know for solving each one and what you still do not know or feel you need to know.

--Jot down in general terms what extrinsic information (e.g. biographical, historical, or literary) might provide useful evidence to

support their hypotheses.

--List questions for debate on the function, the purpose, the connections (in language or character), and/or the unifying structure of a given work.

-- Draw general conclusions from what you have observed and reflect upon them.

--Reconceptualize how the work would be different if you could change X, that is, how does it change the meaning when you change X, e.g., character, time frame, or setting?), or create a metaphor for an event or character in order to reconceptualize its meaning.

4. **Phase IV (testing hypotheses, formulating theses)**: This phase describes the process of "translation" from the student's language into academic discourse (Bartholomae and Petrosky), as well as the process of formulating an hypothesis, summoning evidence from the text and relevant extrinsic information, and assessing the merits of opposing positions (Berthoff).

-- Generate tentative theses and explore how you might defend or support them (that is, with what textual or extrinsic evidence).

-- Jot down possible titles for a paper in order to explore tentative foci, compare with other students's choices, and defend or explain your own choices. How do you account for the similarities and differences?

--Imagine different projected readers (e.g., skeptical) in order to

generate a number of points of view and respond to these imaginary readers's ideas, or write a paper in which you test an hypothesis, using imagined readers' responses.

-- Write an essay that discusses different sides of one of the debates or conflicting arguments (from phase III); an essay that presents a position to one side of a debate with all the evidence you can marshall for support and to compare/contrast yours with other students' positions; an essay in which you synthesize the most significant ideas and draw a conclusion; a paper that takes other students's ideas into consideration and develops your own position; a paper that explores how a fellow student's position is partly right and partly wrong; or, an argumentative paper in which you state a thesis and argue pro and con.

5. **Phase V (Meta-interpretation, reflection)**. This last phase engages the student in meta-cognition, that is becoming aware of the interpreting process itself and interpreting his or her own interpretations (Berthoff, Horton). It, also, involves the student in recognizing and understanding the author's and/or culture's implicit values in the literary work (Burke, Lindberg).

--At frequent internals, write about how your responses to the work have changed since your first reading? (when and why?)

--Looking back over the four phases of concept formation, what can you conclude about the interpretive process?

--Explore your ideas about the role that personal perspective (pre-understandings or ideology) plays in shaping an interpretation? Make a list of examples from the class.
--Construct your own theory about the author's assumptions and values inferred from the text and possibly from other extrinsic information, or about how this work represents a "symbolic form" (Burke) for expressing the author's interpretation of experience.

Susan Horton has written, "the better the interpretation, the more it accounts for" (Horton, 4). This expansiveness of understanding occurs within the context of ongoing personal and interpersonal dialogical interactions made into a "text," itself subject to interpretation, through the log notebook.

CONCLUSION:

Disclosing interpretation as a meaning-making process of the active mind to our students in all humanities courses, and especially in literature class, is possible in numerous, phased writing assignments with built-in exercises in recursive and reflective thinking. If our students are never encouraged, or given the opportunity, to write about (explore, reflect upon, and reshape) their reading and interpretative experiences, they will remain *silenced* by the "language of the empowered." Here, in my view, lies the true crisis of undergraduate education in the literature and general humanities curriculum. There will continue to be differences in interpretation (theoretical debates), whether in the undergraduate literature classroom or in the annual proliferation of

journals of literary criticism. Perhaps the most that we, as professors of literature, can achieve is to employ an epistemic pedagogy that ensures both the activity and the awareness of the student's own responsible and imaginative meaning-making.

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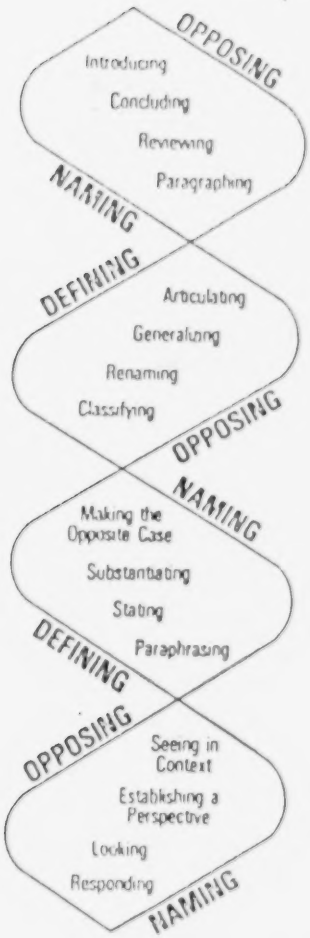
Appendix A



Composing As A Double Helix

Figure 1. Double helix model

Berthoff, A. *The Making of Meaning.* Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1981, p. 8,